
Palestine Committee of Norway

Trade Union Section

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The Palestine Committee of Norway is a solidarity organization dedicated to the Palestine cause. Since it was founded late 1969, the organization has done its solidarity work both in Palestine and Norway. The Trade Union Section (TUS) was founded in 2006, and has since then worked towards members in Norwegian Trade Union movement.

See the Program of principles for the Committee (Palcom – for short) here:
<http://palestinakomiteen.no/join-the-palestine-committee-of-norway/>

The Trade Union Section has members from different trade unions in Norway. This report is a translation of our annual report which we are distributing to our contacts. We also want to share what we do with our Palestinian friends.

Campaign to break connections with Histadrut 2012 - 2013

LO Congress 3. – 7. of May 2013

A tiny background – what is Norwegian LO (Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions)

LO is the biggest and most influential Norwegian trade union congregation, consisting of 22 separate unions, with together 900.000 members of a population of 5 million. All political directions are represented in the organization, from right wing, right wing social democrats to red people, communists and revolutionaries. All these political colors were of course also represented among the 315 elected delegates at the Congress.

Since WW2 LO have been dominated and conducted by the social democrats, and the ties to the Norwegian social democratic Labour Party has been very strong. This symbiotic relationship and overlapping leadership of course also leads to political coordination and unity. This tendency is weakened lately, especially during an organized opposition from the left from the nineteen-seventies. But it is still very significant.

The Norwegian politicians, and specially the social democrats have always been Israels (and USA's) best friends. The Labour party was a very eager accomplice in the establishment of the state of Israel in 1947-48, where they gave the Zionists wholeheartedly support. They were also the initiative takers and the prime movers of the Oslo Channel, which led to the compromised Oslo Accords in 1993. These points of view are of course reflected within the very core and the spinal cord of LO, especially in the leadership.

This said it is necessary to point out and underline that LO has invested a lot of good solidarity work, conducted a lot of projects and put down a great deal of money in supporting Palestine in a lot of different ways. Regarding union politics first of all to support to PGFTU, to which LO has a close cooperation. This is the reason why solidarity with Palestine always has had a strong position in the Norwegian trade union movement. But "dialogue", conversation and cooperation with "both parts" is still a strong tendency in big parts of LO, influenced as it is by the official Norwegian foreign policy. The masterpiece of the social democrats has always been to balance the support to the Palestinians without challenging their Zionist friend Israel. No actions ever taken. This policy becomes increasingly more difficult as the impact of the occupation becomes more clearly every day.

This must be viewed as a background when anyone are going to evaluate the mood and the voting over Palestine motions on the congress, and it describes a little bit the landscape in which we as a solidarity organization are manoeuvring.

First of May 2013
Boycott Israel!
Boycott Histadrut!



The anti-Histadrut Campaign, plan, stages and goals

Since the beginning of 2011 the Trade Union Section of the Palestine Committee in Norway has worked systematically according to a plan towards this LO Congress, with the goal of breaking the connections with Histadrut at LO's Congress 2013. Our first task was to provide the trade union movement in Norway with information about the Zionist organization Histadrut – its historic role in colonizing Palestine, and its present politics towards Palestinian workers. So we produced this article:

<http://palestinakomiteen.no/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Histadrut-artikkel.pdf>

and spread it around.

The next stage was to approach different unions, to ask them to adopt local propositions about Palestine in general and Histadrut in special, and send it further for treatment on the Congress within the certain time limits. We drew up an example statement which we distributed to all our contacts. At this stage, and throughout the whole process, we had several articles and readers letters in the newspapers and in different union journals. We also made this a special theme on our website with lots of articles and arguments. <http://palestinakomiteen.no/faglig-arbeid/histadrut/>

And when all the Congress documents were ready, there were several propositions on Palestine, amongst them three separate motions on Break with Histadrut.

The LO secretariat had delivered a proposed statement that was rather futile. It represented a step backwards compared with the adopted resolution on the last congress in 2009.

Then we had to work out, together with our Palestine friendly elected delegates, a plan on how to argue and act on the Congress negotiations. Our plan was to argue that there must be taken actions that would harm the occupier Israel, and we would try to get a motion saying that LO is in favor of full economic, cultural and scientific boycott of Israel. In the political program we wanted to try to get as many votes as possible for full suspension of the Histadrut from all international trade union organizations until they accept the borders from 1967 and start treating their Palestinian members equally with the Israeli.

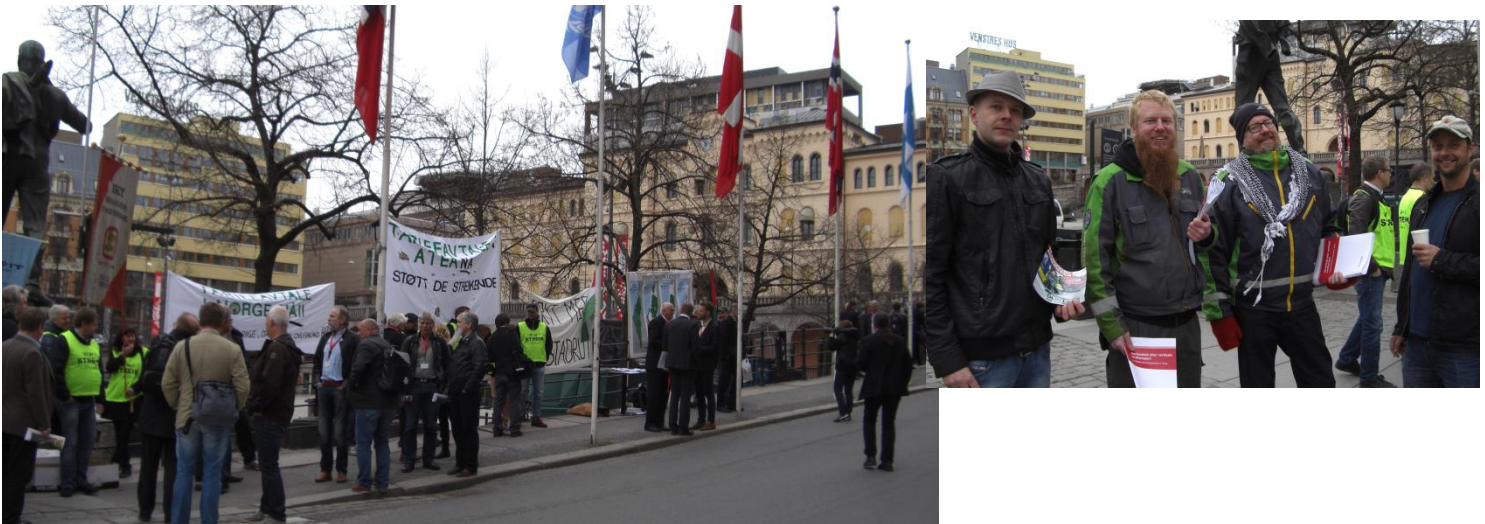
We were not so concerned about the impact if the proposal on Histadrut boycott did not got enough votes. In our view a big minority who would vote in favor of the proposition would move the milestones in BDS-work within the trade unions in Norway, and would also push the statement from the congress in the right and more progressive direction.

On the evening before the opening we had a meeting with our friends who were Palestine supporters at the congress, mostly youth, and agreed on a plan.

We were very well prepared, and our plan very good. The question of Histadrut was promoted by a group of youth delegates, well supported by "old" and experienced solidarity friends of Palestine.



**“Break ties with Histadrut”
and “End the occupation!”**



At the Congress

Pictures from the opening day

During the congress the Trade Union Section arranged stand every morning. At least 5 people, mobilized from all our friends and network. When the delegates arrived the Congress Hall, we were handing out leaflets and information, receiving lots of cheers and much approval.

Together with electrical workers on strike for a general agreement and transport workers on action to preserve the general agreement in the goods sector, we made a good figure out in the street. People were very pleased to see the Palestinian flag outside the Congress.

Below: Handing out leaflets about Histadrut, BDS Movement, boycott G4S and encouragement to join our study trips to Palestine.



Transport workers outside the Congress:

From left:

Terje Samuelsen, leader of the Norwegian Dock Workers Union

Gullbrand Jacobbe-Helleberg, former dock worker, now Palestine Committee, Trade Union Section

Roy Einar Nilsen, leader of Transport Workers Youth

International guests

Among the international guests were Shaher Sa'ed, leader of the Palestinian Trade Union Movement PGFTU. He addressed the Congress on the opening of its second day. In his speech he talked about the effects of the "hatefull occupation" and the warcrimes against his people. He thanked warmly for the support from the Norwegian Trade Unions, and urged for further engagement for palestinian workers, and boycott of settlement products.

Warning in the media

The Norwegian foreign minister Espen Barth Eide addressed the congress on Saturday, the day of the debate of LO's program. After his speech he was interviewed in the press, and there he found it necessary to give a warning to the assembly against breaking the connection with Histadrut. His mantra is dialogue, dialogue and more dialogue, if the previous dialog did not work.



“Our” proposal.



The delegate Roy Einar Nilsen, leader of Transport Workers Youth, addressing the Congress with a very good and engaged speech, delivering this proposal to LO's action program:

To the chapter **international solidarity**:

... The cooperation with PGFTU must continue. The relations to Histadrut must be considered. A prerequisite for further ties to Histadrut is that they accept the demands adopted at the last LO Congress in 2009: The illegal occupation of Palestine must end, the 1967 borders must be respected, the building of illegal settlements must stop and the separation wall must be demolished.

Roy Einars whole speech – see attachment 1, page 7

This proposal was voted over by raising of hands, and unfortunately not counted, as we wanted.

It lost against barely a majority! and was adopted "sent over to the secretariat". This could mean a lot of things. But it was not rejected, and had a great deal of supporters in the congress hall!

There was also a pretty good resolution, unanimously adopted:

LO Congress 2013: Resolution on Palestine – see the whole text, attachment 2, page 8



Result.

We believe that we have done very good work, and that "our" delegates inside the congress hall did a tremendously good job.

A big minority of the delegates voted for breaking

Anyhow - this will be a great victory and a great step forward in the trade union movement in Norway.

And - we hope - great news for the international trade union movement.

Summary and evaluation

In a meeting in Palcom Trade Union Section May 22th

Through several years of work, and especially because our union tours to Palestine and this special campaign, we had influence on the outcome of the Congress. Many delegates have been participants on our union study tours. The result of the Congress was the expression of all the Trade Union Sections (TUC) collective work, along with clever friends of Palestine in the Trade Union Movement in Norway. The interaction between them inside and us standing outside on the stand worked well. The work and the result got political effect, and it will also be very visible in the time to come.

We are very pleased with the result.

In advance we decided that we would be steadfast on our proposal and get it under reconciliation, regardless of whether it would fall. We would prevent the proposal to break with the Histadrut would boil away in a more toothless statement "everyone could agree on." In our experience it in this way the world is progressing, and a controversial proposal will more easily get a majority at the next crossroads. This, we presented to our entire network before Congress, and we discussed it with our friends delegates.

This tactic was changed just before the Congress, at the delegate meeting 2 may, where it came up a suggestion from one of the delegates that there could be tactically wise to tie the proposal up to the Palestinian resolution adopted at the last LO Congress in 2009. Thus, LO was to make demands to the Histadrut, and break with them if they did not made a clearly distance from the central part of the occupation. There is some disagreement in our TUC if this had importance for the outcome, or whether we would get just as many votes on our original proposal. LO in Oslo's proposal to break with the Histadrut was also maintained as proposed, but was voted down by about the same number as our original proposal. Worth noting is that Shaher Said did not go public in his speech to the Congress and warned against breaking. We think that he was very well aware of that this would be raised before he came to Norway.

The Palestine resolution on Palestine became also strong, much stronger than the policy the Norwegian Government and Foreign Department. We got a large minority who voted for a break with the Histadrut. This is helping us to move the positions forwards in the Trade Union Movement in the Palestine cause. The resolution was significantly sharpened in relation to the original proposal from the LO Secretariat, and it indeed urges to action at some points. The minority who would break with the Histadrut was large. We think the gain is that the LO now talks about the boycott and that the great support of breaking the connections will make it easier for those in the LO that mean this to show their stand.

The most important thing was all the work that was done in advance of the Congress. We have been present with the parole about breaking with the Histadrut at conferences like Trondheim Conferences (about 500 people in opposition to LO's social democracy, gathered in Trondheim every January) in 2012 and 2013 and several youth conferences, been present at several Union Congresses with our appeals and handed out material. We have also encouraged local unions to make decisions, and that is what many people have done. We could not have achieved such a result at the Congress without many good decisions locally beforehand.

What we could have done better was to work with the various union delegations in advance. The two largest, The Norwegian Union of Municipal and General Employees and The Norwegian United Federation of Trade Unions, voted mostly in block and voted not for breaking. The Norwegian trade union movement is working in such a way that most matters are decided in the specific Unions delegations. Here is also the deals done in order to achieve results in priority issues for the Union involved. Fighting and compromises are taking place in the corridors and in editorial committees at the congress, and when the comes to voting it is often adapted unanimous.

What we've learned is that this is an issue we've got to win in the separate Unions first. The parole is so important – it is the expression of the trade union part of the BDS movement - and if we get it passed, it is a victory for the whole world.

We have not given in, this is not the end of the fight, but we are now discussing ideas of how we're going to work this on. We want to polemise against "dialogue", since it's the LO leaderships main argument. In the same way act on the standpoint of the PGFTU staff who do not want to break with Histadrut, analyzing the potential causes of it, and clarify that there is a difference between Norwegian foreign policy and Palestinian domestic politics. To get the issue of breaking won in the different unions, working up to the individual unions' congresses, together with our friends and allies, and get the question raised there. We will offer us as speakers at member meetings and announce this on our website, and also use this as an issue of the union study tours, to discuss this with Palestinian union comrades we meet. We will also prepare a larger discussion on trade union strategy, where we will line up our further work.

May 26. 2013

The Palestine Committee of Norway, Trade Union Section

Attachment 1

Roy Einars whole speech

Comrads!

First: In 2009 the LO Congress made a usable resolution on Palestine/Israel. This year I have registered that the Palestine issue has been reduced to be placed into a general statement about the Middle East.

At the same time I would also say that what is expressed on Palestine the motion from the LO Secretariat to the action programme is rather unsatisfactory

I know that many here at the Congress want speak more clearly about the Palestine conflict, and to sharpen the requirements to the Histadrut, the Israeli association of trade unions, the Israeli LO.

The central leadership of PGFTU might mean that we should not break the connections with Histadrut. So I suppose. Let's set some demands on them instead!

A bit of history. The Histadrut was not formed on the basis of solidarity between workers, but with exclusive rights for Jewish labour.

This organization was formed to support colonizing Palestinians ' land and to bolster the Israeli State apparatus. Palestinian workers had not, and still does not have any place in this organization.

My own experiences in Palestine has led to the conclusion that I no longer have faith in what the leaders of the PGFTU says, that we don't have to touch the question of Histadrut.

In the Palestinian BDS movement, which has made a call for boycott, de-investments and sanctions, they say that most of the Palestinian Trade Unions which are subscribed to the international trade union movement want us to should break the connection with the Histadrut. I think this is contradictory to the PGFTU Central says.

Anyway, Norwegian foreign politics can never be equal to Palestinian domestic politics.

The Histadrut has always been behind the Israeli Government and given them clear support in all the abuses towards the Palestinians.

Decisions that have led to the Palestinians remain as losers.

They have supported:

Repeated attacks on and carnage in Gaza

The terror against the Palestinian population through the active use of checkpoints

The construction of the separation wall

The expansion of settlements and the colonizing of land

Comrades. I have faith in dialogue and the potential to achieve something better than what it is today are great, but when Histadrut is facing these serious accusations, we have to consider our relationship with them.

Comrades, we have to move a step forwards, it's time to give a clear message. It's time to set clear, specific requirements to the Histadrut.

On behalf of the Norwegian Transport Workers Union I promote the following:

The relationship with the Histadrut should be reconsidered. A prerequisite for further cooperation is that they accept what we adapted in the Congress in 2009:

Israel's illegal occupation must cease

The 1967 borders must be respected

Israeli illegal settlements must be stopped

The separation wall to be demolished. It is contrary to international law

Thank You Very Much!

Attachment 2

LO Congress 2013: Resolution on Palestine

LO believes Israelis and Palestinians alike have the right to live in peace and security. Israel must bear the responsibility for this not being the case. At the core of the conflict is Israel's illegal occupation of Palestine, which inflicts great suffering on the Palestinian people.

Some three million Palestinians are still refugees in neighbouring countries. Palestinians are treated as second-class citizens in exile, in Israel and in Palestine. Their land is taken from them, their natural resources are usurped and they

are subjected to systematic harassment, grave restrictions on their freedom of movement, frequent use of arbitrary detention and are denied the right to a fair trial.

LO demands that Israel end their illegal occupation of Palestine and respect the UN resolutions on than include Palestinian rights. The refugee problem must be solved in line with UN resolution no 194.

Israel's long-lasting blockade of Gaza, including heavy restrictions on imports and exports, causes great suffering to the population and is an obstacle to economic development. LO demands that the blockade of Gaza be lifted.

The economies of the occupied territories have in great measure become integrated into Israel's economy. Israel must extricate their economy from that of the occupied territories, or else Israel cannot be part of the OECD. Importing goods from the settlements and industrial parks on the West Bank must be made illegal.

The Norwegian government should launch an initiative to organize an international boycott of these goods.

LO would also encourage Norwegian consumers to buy Palestinian products and thus help to foster economic development in Palestine.

The Norwegian government must ensure that the Government Pension Fund of Norway and Norwegian companies do not aid the occupation through trade with and investment in companies that operate in the occupied territories.

Israel will be hosting the European Football Championship in the summer of 2013 (U21-EM). In LO's view, it is important that European championships do not take place on fields that are located on Palestinian land. LO calls on the European Football Federation (UEFA) and the Norwegian Football Federation (NFF) to use the championship to draw attention to the situation suffered by Palestinians and to human rights violations committed in the occupied territories. Norway and Norwegian organisations should coordinate work to improve conditions so that Palestinian youth unhindered may train, qualify for and participate, in international sports events. In this context, support to the participation of Palestinian teams in Norway Cup would be a significant step.

When the United Nations General Assembly granted Palestine the status of observer, the building of illegal settlements on the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, gathered speed. Settler violence against Palestinians and their properties has also escalated. LO demands that attacks be investigated and prosecuted. LO further demands that the stealthy annexation of the West Bank cease and that Israel immediately start moving back the illegal settlers pursuant to the Geneva Convention that bans relocating civilian population in occupied territories.

Israel's demolition of Palestinian buildings is getting more intense and extensive. As Palestinians are almost always denied permission to build in East Jerusalem and the parts of the West Bank that are under Israeli administration (60 per cent), many build their homes without obtaining the necessary permits. UN estimates place almost half of Palestinian buildings in these areas at risk of demolition. The Norwegian government must demand an end to the razing of these buildings and to the gross discrimination of Palestinians.

Israel's frequent use of administrative custody and remand with no due hearing does not comply with international law. Recently, many Palestinians have publicly signalled their abhorrence of this practice by taking part in dramatic hunger strikes. LO condemns the use of administrative detention and demands that Israel immediately release Palestinians who have not been charged and prosecuted in accordance with international standards for fair trials.

The wall erected by Israel, their settlements and the supporting infrastructure make huge inroads into Palestinian lands. The ongoing fragmentation of the West Bank undermines Palestinian rights to self-determination and impedes a two-State solution. The wall must be demolished.

The Norwegian government must pursue an active policy, not least towards the United States and the European Union, to pressure Israel into respecting the recommendations issued by the International Court in The Hague in respect of the wall and into ending their occupation.

Norway must take a clear stand on the recognition of Palestine as a full-fledged member of the UN and Palestine should be granted the status of an independent State within the borders established in 1967